

In Memoriam Reginald William Sims

Reginald William Sims will be remembered for his outstanding contribution to oligochaete taxonomy, however the world of oligochaete taxonomy was not his original profession and oligochaetes were not in fact originally his chosen taxa.

Sims served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War and continued this service for a few years after the war ended until he left the forces to obtain a degree in biology. By 1952 he had got a job as a scientific officer in the Ornithology section at the Natural History Museum, London (although based at Tring in Hertfordshire) and by 1955 he was a Senior Scientific officer with several publications to his name. A highlight of his time with this group came in 1956, when he took part in a six-month expedition to North Borneo jungle, along with Edward Banks, and collected 700 bird specimens.

In 1960 however things changed dramatically when Sims was moved to be head of the Annelid section at the South Kensington site of the Museum, and then his work on oligochaetes began. Very soon he was encouraging depositions from all over the world. Specimens started arriving from the Solomon Islands, Malta, Bolivia, Anatolia to name but a few. Sims wrote out easy instructions for enthusiastic helpers, such as civil servants who were stationed overseas, on how to go about collecting and fixing earthworms for him and he was in correspondence with many interna-

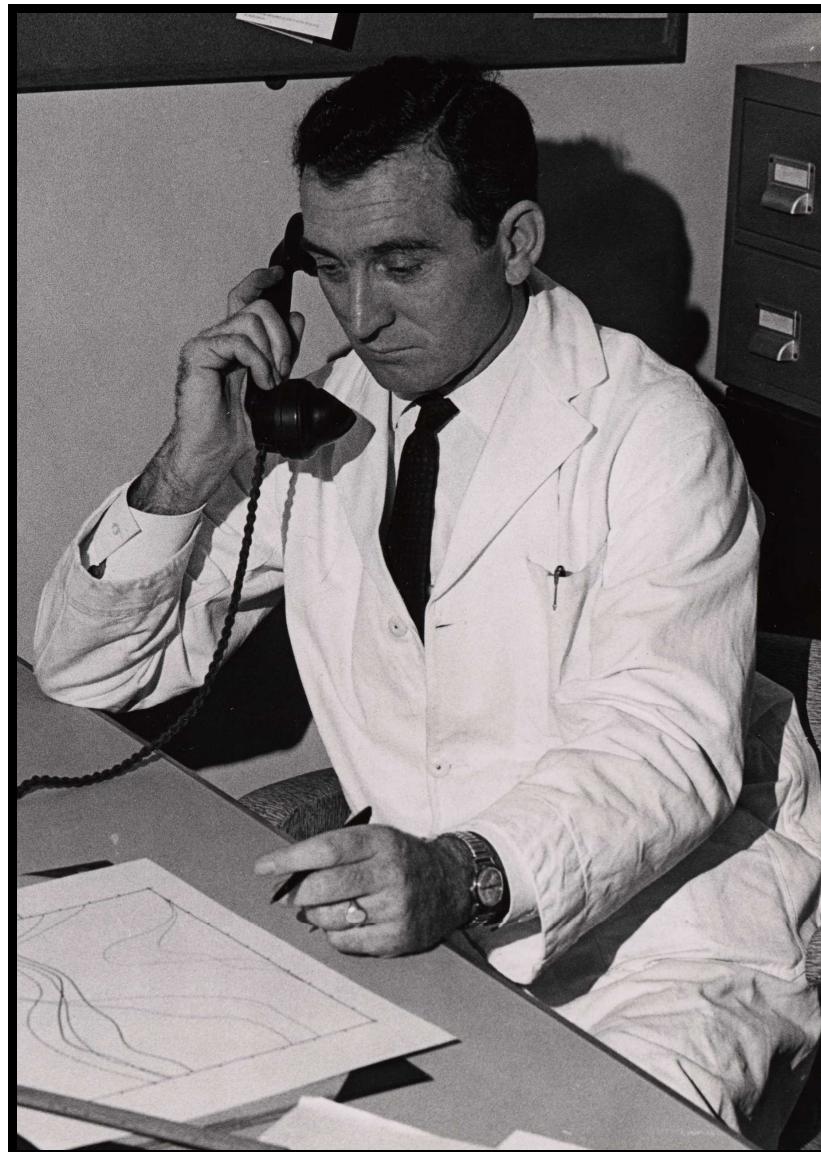
tional colleagues. The biggest growth in the collection came when Edward Easton joined Sims' team. In 1978 alone, 2,863 oligochaete specimens were donated to the Museum. Sims and Easton collaborated on a paper on the pheretimoid earthworms in 1972 which is still one of the most authoritative texts on this group despite the 40 years which have passed since its publication.

Sims was also co-author on the 1985 (revised 1999) key to the British fauna which certainly is considered a bible for the next generation of British earthworm scientists, so his legacy continues.

Sims was not just a highly skilled traditional taxonomist but was also a moderniser and was early to recognise the benefit of using computers in taxonomy, beginning with utilising punch-card systems in the 1960s. He was instrumental in establishing the Earthworm Society and helped to organise one of the first International Oligochaeta conferences in 1985 in Grange-over-Sands.

Sims retired in 1986 although kept working on taxonomy until unfortunately his eye sight began to fail. He will be very sadly missed by colleagues and friends alike both in the UK and overseas.

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(Photo: David George)

Reginald William Sims
(1926–2012)

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